We are told lots of things. What makes something relevant (that we take to heart) is who says it and when they say it- in other words what we are going through at the time. And surely, the most important thing- and what we can treasure - are promises.

And can’t we apply that to God’s Word? Here we have three promises. But just what are they? Are they really for us- for you personally? And if so, what do they mean for your life. Let’s have a look at that this morning.

Just what is God promising here? Is it for you? And what does it mean for your life is what we’ll be considering this morning. Three promises.

The people of Israel were in exile in Persia – away from their beloved country and felt so distant from God- that God didn’t care about them any longer. They didn’t like the situation they were in – they saw it as captivity.

Do you see yourself in the same situation -distant from God/ looking for some escape from your situation?

God doesn’t offer an escape. He gives Himself to them. He is there with them.

I have found myself reading this to people who are struggling - some who are dying.

There is no possibility of escape-the important thing – the only thing that could help is to know that God is with them.

The first promise is that God gives Himself. His presence. I am with you.

And the result: you have no need to be afraid. Just when Jesus appeared to his disciples. He was there. He took away their fear and gave them peace.

I have told people they could put their own names in verse 1. You could.

But we may be thinking- No, it’s addressed to these 2 people: Jacob and Israel. They are the same person. Jacob’s name changed to Israel. Jacob means cheat. Israel he struggles with God- the name God bless him with when he struggled with Him at Jabbok Ford (Genesis 32) You could see this as the two natures of Israel: a cheat and blessed: sinner and saint. Haven’t we seen those two natures aspects in ourselves? We might think God is with me when I am good but when I am bad, he deserts me. No that is not the case.

That is love his love for you. That is the second promise.

Can you see it here? It could not be clearer Verse 4 you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you,

It is in the context of him being our creator- He says that at the beginning and at the end of this passage- you can see them as bookends and this in the very heart.

He created you, so he knows you. He made you the person you are. He formed you- like a potter making a pot. Yes, he knows you and yet He still loves you. How beautiful. As I said in the children’s address: as only a mother could love their child. You are precious- beautiful to me.

What is the extent of this love? On either side of that phrase. I find that a little hard to say that to someone with whom I am sharing his. It seems to be distant from their situation.

However, what is God saying- you are so valuable – as valuable as the land of Ethiopia (Cush) Egypt and Seba is in modern day Yemen. King Cyrus – the Persian ruler would conquer them- God was giving them to him. It would be the ransom that somehow would lead to their release. That is how valuable they are. We can take the same image- what is God the Father willing to give up for us. His only dear Son- our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, Jesus is giving Himself for us. Yes, Jesus is giving Himself for us.

It is important to consider if you were to go back and read the chapter (Isaiah 42) you might expect the next word here to be a word of judgment. He just been telling them what they are going through is
punishment and yet they weren’t responding. You are not taking this to heart. But instead it is grace—pure grace. I give myself to you. I love you.

We might be thinking we deserve judgement and now God is saying this to us.

Again, can you believe it? It might be taking to others but is it really speaking to me? It is too good to be true.

These words might have been through Jesus mind as He went down into the Jordan to be Baptised. Verse 2. He would be going into the fiery trials (1 Peters4:12) of the devil’s temptation in the desert following that—right through his ministry he would have uncertain times and just as the people of Israel felt deserted, he too felt deserted by God in his suffering—He even shouted out the question Why when he was in the at his lowest on the cross.

Remember what the Father said to him (we heard it in the Gospel reading (Luke 3:22) and this was before He had started His ministry. It wasn’t over what he had done but who He is.

You could say that is all about Jesus—But it’s not me. Are we baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3,4).

In other words when the Father sees us – he sees Jesus. You have put on Christ (Colossians 3) These words are directed to you.

He has also given you His Holy Spirit, so you can grow in that faith to hold onto this promise. That’s his love for you.

Hold onto it—especially when you feel as though life is going to swamp you or using the other imagery the going gets too hot.

As an aside: I wonder if someone river and waters and the fires we go through are actually means of escape as it were for the people of Israel who went through the Red Sea on dry ground (Exodus 14) and likewise the River Jordan (Joshua 3) into the promised land. And when God saved Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego through the fiery furnace. (Daniel 3). That is God’s way. It is expression of love and in fact it builds up our faith.

There is a third promise here. It is the promise of Wholeness.

When God spoke these words, He was talking to all the people of Israel—those dispersed by King Cyrus. (Verses 5 and 6.) Can you see he would bring them back as one?

God’s goal is to make each of us whole: completeness, with integrity, totally healthy.

By knowing His love, with the faith He gives – to take his love to heart and Him being a part of our life we goes long way to this happening. Of course, the final healing will happen in heaven. Then we will be complete.

But in the meantime, hear God’s promise in THE MESSAGE... Amen

Pastor Leon Rosenberg
CSR

1-4 But now, GOD’s Message, the God who made you in the first place, Jacob, the One who got you started, Israel: “Don’t be afraid, I’ve redeemed you. I’ve called your name. You’re mine. When you’re in over your head, I’ll be there with you. When you’re in rough waters, you will not go down. When you’re between a rock and a hard place, it won’t be a dead end—Because I am GOD, your personal God, The Holy of Israel, your Savior. I paid a huge price for you: all of Egypt, with rich Cush and Seba thrown in! That’s how much you mean to me! That’s how much I love you! I’d sell off the whole world to get you back, trade the creation just for you.

5-7 “So don’t be afraid: I’m with you. I’ll round up all your scattered children, pull them in from east and west. I’ll send orders north and south: ‘Send them back. Return my sons from distant lands, my daughters from faraway places. I want them back, every last one who bears my name, every man, woman, and child Whom I created for my glory, yes, personally formed and made each one.’”

Children’ address: Only a mother can love them- only the creator/ the shepherd can love them.